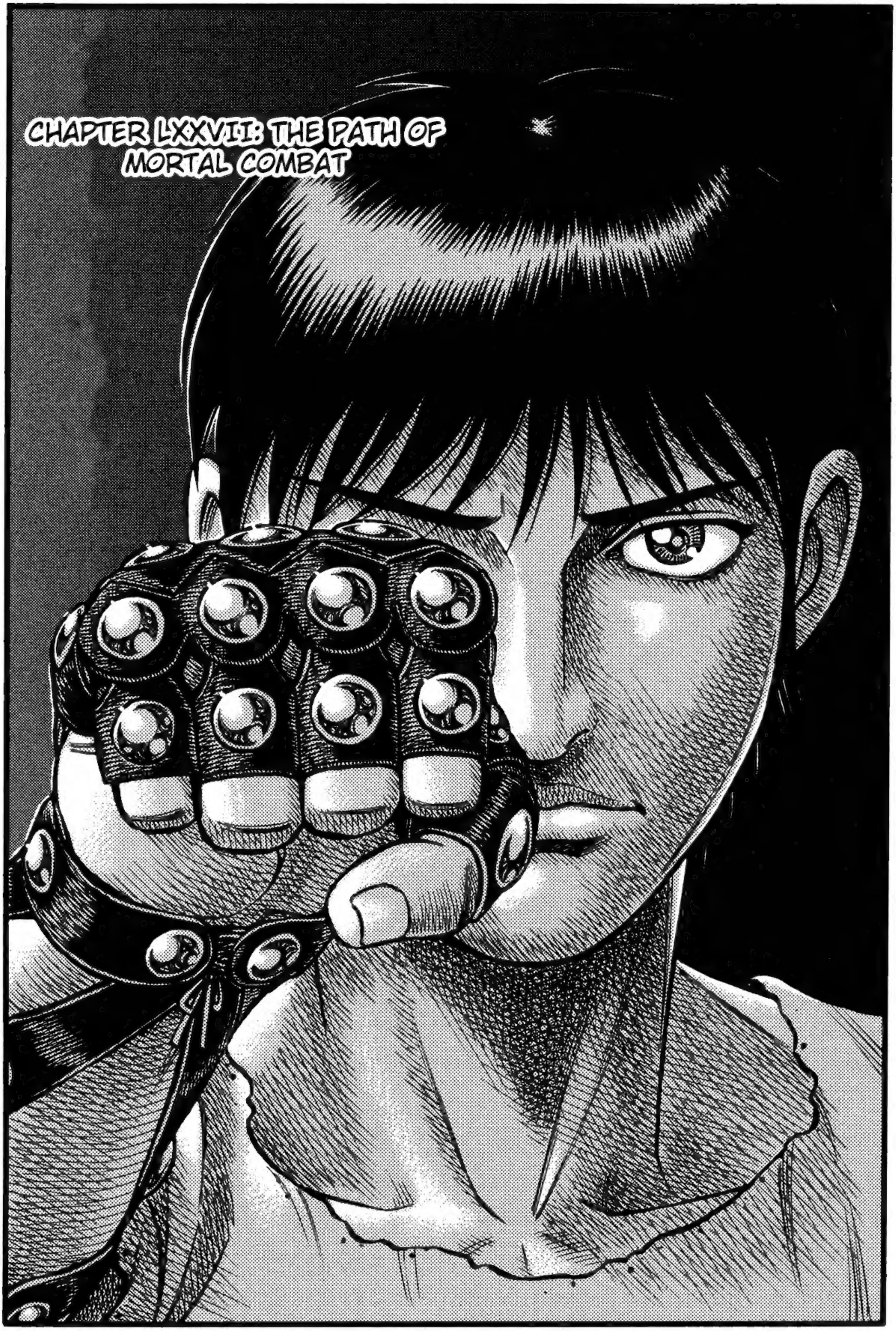
CHAPTER LXXVII: THE PATH OF MORTAL COMBAT



TO DEFEAT SOMEONE, AND TO KILL THEM...

ARE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT THINGS!

YOU'RE SAYING... TO...

STRIKE TO KILL MY OPPONENT, MASTER...?

I'M NOT SAYING TO HATE YOUR OPPONENT.

NOR TO OUTRIGHT KILL...

I WASN'T TALKING ABOUT SUCH VULGAR MATTERS!

THEY'RE TOTALLY DIFFERENT THINGS.

THERE'S NO WAY I COULD DO SO AGAINST AN OPPONENT I DON'T HATE...!

WHILE I'VE LOST MYSELF TO KILLING INTENT BEFORE...

IT'S NOT LIKE I'VE EVER TRIED TO WIN BY DRIVING MY OPPONENT TO THEIR DEATH!

STILL, EVEN IF HE WAS A BROKEN OLD HERO...

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IT'S WONDERFUL THAT YOU HAD THE STRENGTH TO ACTUALLY KILL HIM.

MASTER!

READINESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ISSUE FOR YOU!

YOU FINALLY HAVE THE ENTRANCE WITHIN REACH...

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YET UPON MERELY GLANCING BY A FIGHT TO THE DEATH, YOU FIND YOURSELF PARALYZED BY FEAR...

ANSWER ME.

WHAT IS THIS, CESTVS?

THE WEAPON WE FIGHT WITH.

Y... YOUR FIST.

UH...

IT IS LETHAL.

WE STRIKE AND HIT OUR OPPONENTS TO DEFEND OURSELVES.

IT IS NOT FOR SHOW.

CORRECT.

A WEAPON, AND A TOOL WE USE FOR OUR OWN DEFENCE.

ONCE YOU HAVE SUCH MIGHT...

YOU WILL BE ABLE TO REPEL DESPERATE OPPONENTS, AND PRESERVE YOUR LIFE.

IF YOU CANNOT KILL, IT HAS NO WORTH!

IF YOU DON'T STRIKE, YOU'LL BE CRUSHED.

LISTEN UP, CESTVS.

YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES WILL NOT CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

ACTUAL COMBAT TESTS BOTH WAYS TO KILL AND HOW YOU LIVE!

DON'T BELIEVE YOU'LL FACE AS SOFTHEARTED AN OPPONENT AS KALDAN EVER AGAIN!

THOSE OPPONENTS YOU FACE, BEARING THE SAME LETHAL WEAPONS, WILL GRANT YOU NO MERCY.

KALDAN...

THEY'RE WORN BY BOXERS WHO HAVE TRAINED TO THEIR UTMOST.

I AM NOT EXAGGERATING.

THE CESTVS YOU WEAR ARE GENUINE WEAPONS OF DEATH.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS?

IF UTILISED CORRECTLY...

THEIR MIGHT IS AS GREAT AS THAT OF A BLADE'S!

IF THAT'S TRUE THEN...

AS POWERFUL AS A BLADE?

COULD YOU WIN WITH YOUR FISTS...

.AGAINST A BLADE?!

...

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE TYPE WITH A SHARP PERCEPTION.

YOU'RE STILL INEXPERIENCED WHEN IT COMES TO CONTROLLING YOUR EMOTIONS, THUS IT'S EASY FOR YOU TO BECOME DISTURBED, AND LOSE THE HARMONY BETWEEN YOUR HEART, BODY AND TECHNIQUE.

FROM HERE ON IN FIGHTS, PERFECTING YOUR HEART WILL BE OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE.

HOLD THE STRENGTH TO DRIVE YOURSELF.

BUT YOU MUST CONTROL YOUR HEART, CESTVS.

I'M NOT SAYING TO GROW CALLOUS.

THOSE WHO'RE SWAYED AND HESITATE FROM SUCH EMOTIONS CAN FIND IT FATAL.

FEAR, ANGER.

HATRED, COMPASSION.

PRIDE, IMPATIENCE.

HESITATION AND CARELESS-NESS.

SUCH STERN ADVICE.

HE HAD NOT EXPECTED...

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CESTVS KNEW THAT HE HAD BEEN NAIVE TO EXPECT PARTICULARLY KIND ENCOURAGEMENT.

WE SHOULD GET GOING THOUGH.

THE BOSS HAS CALLED FOR US.

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A DOUBT HAD ARISEN WITHIN HIM WHICH SENT A CHILL DOWN HIS SPINE.

YET STILL...

HAVE MADE SUCH A DECLARATION?

COULD SOMEONE WITH NO EXPERIENCE FIGHTING BLADES...

THAT HE HAD KILLED A STRONG FOE WITH HIS OWN HANDS?

DID THE UNDAUNTED NATURE OF HIS MASTER'S WORDS REVEAL...

GET AS WILD AS YOU WANT.

YOU WON'T HAVE ANYTHING BINDING YOU.

IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS, BUT YOU'LL BE FREE DURING THE FIGHT.

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MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A NEW PERSON!

SHUT IT. NO COLLAR OR CHAINS EH...

HE'S BETTER THAN I'D THOUGHT.

HUFF.

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HURRY UP OLD MAN, GET MY OPPONENT OUT.

WOULD ALREADY PUT A RACEHORSE TO SHAME!

HE'S SO WELL TRAINED THAT HIS TONED FLESH...